To Think About:

Page 2 – The Men Who Built the Ships
   A. Shipwrights Talk about their Work
      - How are employment practices and issues of health and safety in today’s
        places of labor similar or different from the way they were a century ago?
   B. Images of the Men Who Built the Ships

Page 3 – C. The Men Who Built the Ships Form a Union
   - What are the primary goals of this union? How similar might they be for a
     union forming in 2015?
   - React to the way the USAB conducted its meetings. On what issues did it
     focus and how successfully?
   - What became of the union? Explain why it headed the direction it did.

Page 8 – D. Wages and Men in the Yard
   - Who really controlled things in the shipyard? What factors would come into
     play when USAB tried to shift from a ten hour day to an eight hour day?
   - Do you concur with Bunting’s assessment of Edward Sewall? Why-

Page 9 – E. William D. Sewall’s Sons Carry on the Family Tradition
   - Comment on the business activities in which “the boys” are involved

Page 10 – F. CHIPS

Page 11 – G. Log of the W.F.Babcock
   - What thoughts come into your head as you think about taking your whole
     family on multi-year voyages such as described by Maria Murphy?
1. THE MEN WHO BUILT THE SHIPS
A. SHIPWRIGHTS TALK ABOUT THEIR WORK

. . . Now the sorts of things that worried the ordinary, day-laboring shipyard worker of those days were much similar to those that concern shipyard workers today: the fluctuating nature of the work, job security, wages and the danger of the calling.

Accidents in shipyard work were common. Dana Story says, “the four-fingered hand was almost the badge of the ship carpenter, and in those early days, no workman’s compensation insurance was there to ease the blow. Caulkers could usually be sure that after twenty years or so, deafness would overtake them.” Broken-down men who have followed job-work are common,” reported one Massachusetts ship joiner in 1870. “. . . Wet docks are frightful in their effects. Piles is the most prominent evil from this cause.” Another reports, “there is great injury to the eyes from working by lamplight upon government vessels, as much of the work under the docks is done by lamplight.”

Remember that men had to work to be paid, and any accident necessitating absence from work was simply money out of his pocket. “Government knows no one who does not answer to his name at the calling of the roll,” observed one Navy yard employee; “these accidents are wholly at our expense.”

“The business of shipwright is one of much danger,” noted one realist, “but much might be obviated by better stages and less driving by the bosses.” “Falling might be prevented,” mused one worker, “if employers thought as much of the value of the employee’s life as they do of what they accumulate from his labor.”

Falls seemed to be the prime concern, however. “Accidents to our business are broken bones, bruises and cuts. Which are prevented by being careful: but we are liable to accidents from other causes, such as falls, or things falling upon us.” The newspapers of these days picture a steady rain of workmen from the upper stages to the beds of chips below, or show staging and timbers showering workmen on their head and shoulders. The tumbles seem fantastic – perhaps a century’s distance makes them more so – and the size of timbers survived are legion.

---

3 Ibid., p. 328.
4 Ibid., p. 329.
5 Ibid., p. 329.
6 Ibid., p. 269.
7 Ibid., p. 331.
The tendency of the shipbuilding business to run hot and cold is another concern to the shipyard workers whose complaints have survived. “During the 25 years I have worked, I have had only 4 or 5 years of steady employment,” reports one. During 1888, not a bad year for work, Bath ship carpenters reporting to the State’s Bureau of Industrial and Labor statistics indicated that they’d lost an average of 105 days during the year because of inability to get work. Two years later, the average had dropped to 59 days. In either case, consistent day work was no guarantee

B. IMAGES OF THE MEN WHO BUILT THE SHIPS

![Shipwrights at the Bowker Yard](image1)

![Shipwrights planking-up in Bath](image2)

![Dinner time at the Minott Yard](image3)

![Caulkers at Camden’s Holly Bean Yard](image4)

C. THE MEN WHO BUILT THE SHIPS FORM A UNION
Records of the United Shipwrights Association.
Bath Maine
1865

Preamble

In securing a union of Shipwrights for the practical purpose of our present and future welfare, it requires that the object in view should be clearly set forth, so that it may be well understood.

We should always endeavour to cultivate feelings of harmony and unity among all Shipwrights, so that we may be able to establish a uniformity of wages, and receive a just and fair compensation for our labor, in accordance with the prices of the common necessaries of life, appertaining to our wants as mechanics.

Among the many associations of the present day, the Shipwrights are occupying a prominent position; and we deem it an act of justice to ourselves, and to our posterity, that we associate ourselves together, for a more united effort, and a more extended action, in behalf of our rights and interests.

We hold the justice and truth of the principle, that "merit makes the man;" and we firmly believe that industry, sobriety and a proper regard for our fellow men, form the basis upon which that principle rests; and we therefore recognize no rule of action or principle, that would elevate wealth above industry, or the professional man above the mechanic.

We deem it necessary to take some action to prevent imposition upon us in any form, to exert a helping hand to our aged fellow Shipwrights, and to exert a beneficial influence among all those who labor with us.

We have now become a regularly constituted organization, it becomes the duty of every Shipwright to "rally around the standard" of our association; adopting the old maxim that – 

United we stand, divided we fall.

From the Constitution of the UNITED SHIPWRIGHTS ASSOCIATION OF BATH
Article III - This Association shall consist of Shipwrights only. No other class of mechanics shall be admitted.

**From the By Laws**
Article III – Any member that shall work for less than the established wages of the Association shall be dealt with as the Association may decide.
Article V – Any member of the Association who shall divulge any of the proceedings of the Association except to a member shall be dealt with as the Association may deem proper.
Article VI – No person shall be allowed to bring any complaint before the Association to the injury of any person;
Article VII - No private discussion allowed in the Hall, while the Association is in session.
Article X – All political, religious, or sectarian matters are strictly prohibited from being discussed at or during the meeting of the Association.
Article XII- In case of the Death of any member of this Association, the Association shall pay or cause to be paid to his widow or children, whatever would be his equal share of the funds of the Association.

**From the Book of Minutes**

**Dec 21** – Voted to raise monthly dues to fifty cents a quarter commencing the first meeting in January 1866 to be paid in advance, and no member entitled to the password until he is square with the books.

**Dec 28** – Resolved that every member be a Committee to seek out those that are at work to learn whether they are not infringing on the rights of others & inform them accordingly. Jan 25, 1866 – Raised a Committee to nominate a candidate for a Delegate to the International Convention … Nominated Moses O. Crafts. He was elected. Voted to furnish the Delegate with 75dollars to defray his expenses.

Moses O. Crafts was elected the local Vice President of this Union.

**Feb 1st** – Took a vote of the meeting to see how many were in favor of the 8 hour week. The vote was unanimous.

**Feb 8** – It was voted that the Carpenters Association appoint a Committee to confer with the Temperance Union in regard to nominating Candidates for the next municipal election.

**Feb 15** – Voted that the Bell be rung at 7 o’clock and sunset until the first of March and then to be rung as usual.

Listened to the report of our delegate to the International Convention.

**Feb 24** – *(Met by special call)* Took a vote of the meeting to see how many were in favor of setting first class wages at 3 dollars the First Monday in March. The vote was declared unanimous.

Raised a committee of 2 from each yard where they were at work to inform the employers of the action of this meeting. Also raised a comm’ of 3 to get Bills printed & post them up at the various yards.

**Mar 8** – The Corresponding Secretary (Moses Crafts) … read a few extracts from letters received from Officers of the International Union to the effect that everything was going on well.

Listened to remarks from various members in regard to how the employers received the advance of wages. The reports were favorable.
Mar 29 - The Committee raised to procure a seal, suggested the forward & after lines of a Ship, encircled by the words (Knowledge is Power) which were accepted by the Association.

Mr. Crafts read a letter from the Union Association of Charlestown Mass in reference to the management of Union Stores and the profits of them &c.

Apr 12 – The Corresponding Sec. read some letters he had received from New York and vicinity in reference to the 8 hour strike. & that they needed some pecuniary assistance. Voted that the Corresponding Sec. confer with the International Union. Then we shall act in this matter & report at the next meeting.

Apr 19 – Wm B. Scott & James Eastman belonging to New York Associations being present. Handed in their cards and were accepted into this Union. The Corresponding Sec read some communications from the International Union to the effect that they were still on the strike in New York and needed some help if we could assist them.

Had a recess of 15 minutes to consult together.

After being called to order voted to take up a subscription in their aid and raised 18 dollars.

Ap 21 - …a communication was read by Corresponding Sec. from the International Union N.Y. stating that they were still on the strike for 8 hours and were determined to carry the point.

Motioned & carried that those who had not paid would now pay one dollar or more if they chose for the relief of brother Shipwrights in N.Y. Voted that we take enough money from the Treasury to make up 50 dollars with what we have received by Subscription & send to N York.

Moved & carried that a meeting be called & that we invite all mechanics to meet with us for the purpose of raising money to send to the NY Strikers.

May 20 – The following was printed this day in the New York Herald: “Mr. Moses O. Crafts, in a letter from Bath, addressed to Mr. Gustavus Birch, of Brooklyn, a member of the Shipwrights’ Association, writes: -- ‘We rejoice that your men stand firm to their position. At a special meeting it was voted to raise one dollar per member as soon as we can and send the same to Mr. Mich. New York city cannot live two months without the labor of the men. Ships and steamers must be built and repaired. When these men stop work, New York commerce dies, and the bosses know it. This world’s work must be done. The rich man’s money is totally worthless unless some laborer goes with it to produce what he eats, drinks and wears. The mechanics engaged in this movement claim no more for themselves than they are willing to concede to others, and when the bosses are willing to concede all they claim for themselves (and they cannot be honest men unless they do so) they will not question your right to adopt the eight hour system. The industrial classes are coming up to rule this great country. Then there will be less money panics, less money brokers, less stagnation of all kinds, less beggary, less poverty, less drunkenness and crime, less aristocracy and less disloyalty to our beloved government.’ Other letters of a similar tendency have been received.”

May 24 – Mr. Blethen late from N. York was called upon & responded, giving a favorable account of the Strike. If they could be promptly assisted a short time longer he thought they could carry their point without doubt.

Voted to take fifty dollars from the Treasury to send to N.Y.to assist our Brother Mechanics.

June 7 - Voted that each member be a committee to find out who it is that reports the actions of this Association outside of this Hall.

June 14 – The Carpenters and Joiners of New York had capitulated and went back to work at the old rates. The Caulkers held out longer.
June 21 – Some interesting remarks were made upon the 8 hour movement by several members of the Association.

June 28 – Remarks were made upon out of Townsmen coming in here and going to work under pay, & inquiries were made want is to be done in the matter.

July 4 – A major fire wipes out most of the commercial district and many residences in Portland.

July 5 – Voted that all the money now in the Treasury that was raised for the New York strikers, be sent to the Portland sufferers. Voted to add 8 dollars more to the Portland relief fund. & that the Corresponding Sec. hand the money to the Mayor of Bath to be forwarded to the Portland sufferers.

July 6 – The Committee raised to visit the sik reported Hugh Toby Sick & needing some assistance. Voted to draw 10 dollars from the Treasury for the relief of Hugh Toby & place it in the hands of the Committee for that purpose.

July 19 – Motioned & carried to raise a Committee of 3 to enquire after & see Mr. Dunning who is suffering with a broken leg.

The Recording Sec presented a Certificate received from the International Union authorizing us to act as an Association under the name of Shipwrights Union No.1 of Maine.

Aug 9 – Some interesting discussion was held by various members as to the best method of dealing with those who will not join our Association. Several motions were made & withdrawn.

Aug 16 – A notice was read from the Dayly Voice [a nationally distributed labor-orientated newspaper] of a call to meet in convention at Baltimore of all classes of workmen on the 20th of August to take in consideration & discuss the best method of procuring a less number of hours of labor per day. A vote was taken to see if we would send a delegate. The vote was not carried.

Oct 18 – Some remarks were made in reference to Calkers joining this Association. Raised a team of 2 to talk with them n& report at the next meeting.

Oct 25 – A motion was made to establish wages for the coming winter at 2.75

Nov 1 – Voted that the wages be retained at $3.00 per day until the 1st Monday in Dec. and then be reduced to 2.50 per day.

Raised a committee of 3 to visit those that were at work in Rogers Yard & learn if they were at work for less than the established price.

Nov 8 – Some discussion was had in reference to what we should do with members that work under pay. But no action was taken.

Feb 21, 1867 – Motioned & carried that wages be set at 3.00 per day on new work & 3:50 on Old, commencing the first Monday in March next. That the notice be given by inserting it in the daily paper for 3 consecutive days.

The subject of rating or gradation of Carpenters were taken up & voted that it be referred to the next meeting as an especial subject.

Mar 28 – [Discussion about work on the old ship JAS. F. PATTEN ]…after which all the members of the Association present which were aqt work on the Old Ship Jas. F. Patten agreed to demand 3.50 per day or knock off.

Voted that no member of the Association go to work on the Old Ship until those members which were knock off have the offer to go to work first.

Apr 4 – The subject of reducing wags was brought up before the Association and freely discussed. After which a vote was taken on reducing the wages to 2.50 per day on Old & new work without distinction. The vote was nearly unanimous.
A vote was called to see if any were willing to work for less than the price set by the Association. None were in favor of taking less.

**Nov 7** - Remarks were made by several members concerning the rate of wages for the winter. Concluded that 2.50 was low enough and dropped the matter there.

**June 18, 1868** – Remarks were made by the Pres in regard to the object of this meeting. After which several other members expressed their opinions in regard as to whether we should try & reorganize this Association or whether we should let it go down. After which a vote was taken resulting in favor or organizing.

**June 24** – Remarks were made by several members in reference to the price of wages this summer. All favored the price of 3.00 & decided to ask it of our employers.

**Dec 21, 1870** – After some discussion it was voted to pay all members wishing for it their share of the funds and all others to turn theirs in towards a Drafting School. But one present called for his money. He took his part & left the Hall.

The Old organization was considered dissolved and new officers were chosen to arrange for a Drafting School.

The number of members belonging to the Association according to the constitution was 17.  
(Moses O. Crafts was one of these.)

A copy of the minute book and a binder of newspaper articles about the 1866 New York shipyard workers’ strike for the 8 hour day are available in the class library. The Minute book was presented over forty years ago to Marine Museum (now Maine Maritime Museum) by the local union of machinists at Bath Iron Works.

---

**D. RUNNING A SHIPYARD – WAGES AND THE MEN IN THE YARD**

In William Bunting’s “Live Yankees: The Sewalls and their Ships” we find only a few references to wages paid to the men who did the hands-on work of building ships.

“A look at the building account of the ship *Eric the Red*, launched September 1871, shows that “carpenter labor,” i.e., the building of the hull (not including caulking, joinery spars, etc.) was contracted out to master builder Elisha Mallett, who hired the crew. Mallett was credited with $12,415 for 5,333-1/3 days of labor at $2.25 a day, and 184-6/10 days of Sunday labor. Presumably the labor rate included Mallett’s profit.

“Although Mallett did his own hiring, it would be naive to think that the Sewalls did not have the final say over wages. In March 1884 Arthur [Sewall] wrote Sam Sewall regarding sewall’s hiring of a crew to build *Ranier*: “He [Mallet] has no need to fear about getting all the men he needs at $1.50 & I don’t think we better allow him to pay more except for extra men.” (p. 136.)
“Arthur, though younger, took the lead in business decisions, although Edward [his older brother] appears to have had a better understanding of ships, and also perhaps of the common man – he was particularly popular with the men in the yard. In a letter to Arthur written in July 1877 from Philadelphia – then the epicenter of perhaps the most violent labor uprising in American history – Edward recognized the plight of the laboring class:

‘It has been so fearfully hot that men [stevedores] cannot do much. We should be thankful that our property here [ship or ships in port] has not been destroyed. I think now the main trouble is over but it has so discouraged things it will be hard for labor to find work. No lack of labor here for city or [railroad] work at .80 to 1.00 per day. It is low pay for a man with a family to pay his bills & be honest.’” (p. 151)

E. RUNNING A SHIPYARD – WILLIAM D. SEWALL’S REMAINING SONS CARRY ON THE FAMILY TRADITION.

Just three years after William Sewall JR. ‘s death at 24, his two younger brothers Edward and Arthur, just 21 and 19 began to build vessels on their own account. Within eleven years – the date of the following letter, they had financed, built and launched eleven vessels. They continued their partnership until 1879, having built 42 vessels. Arthur continued another twenty years until his death in 1899, and his nephews carried on until 1916. This letter only hints at the scope of this family’s shipbuilding efforts.

The papers of this unusual business are archived at Maine Maritime Museum. They cover the years 1761 to 1932 and fill 634 archive boxes, or 303 shelf feet, probably the largest non-government nineteenth century shipping collection in North America. Alone th

Bath Sept 4th 1865

Dear Father

We last wrote you on the 29th ult and presume you are now in Paris, which seems to us almost home although we do not know your route from there.

No marked change here since our last. The new bark is now finished and ready for business ut have not secured anything but hope to fix her to-day for Ice from Gardiner to New Orleans at about 9# . . . .and shall take Hay between decks. Have named her Frank Marion and put the Sewall Coat of Arms in Shield on her Stern.

We have now a keel stretched say 185 feet and shall have a Ship in frame in a few weeks and shall probably stretch on one berth a small keel for [a] Barrk and perhaps timber her out this fall as a foundation for Spring work.

We have purchased of Johnson Rideout 1/8 of Ship ‘America’ at rate of 65000$ and have charged you with 1/8th of it and Mr. Red 3/8th the balance to us. Mr. Larrabee’s property has all been sold, his house for 9000$ shipyard $2500 the vessel property at very low rates. Mr. Larrabee took his House & yard. . . .
We suppose you will take time enough from your regular tour to see Capts Small and Morse in Cardiff. They will probably both Copper there and we hope you will see them both and would wish you to have Frank give Capt Small full power to sell his . . . in the Freeman Clark and as you will doubtless see the Barings please have a statement of our a/c made up to latest date you can and bring with you. We draw 1 11 0 0 [Pounds Sterling] last week sold @ 15-17%  This will pay our last accommodation note and give us the most of our ‘Hilyhgead’ loss funds to pay our other debts.

Your Aft Sons
E&A SEwall

F.  RUNNING A SHIPYARD – CHIPS AUGMENT WAGES

There is a lot of scrap wood produced when constructing a wooden ship of any size. For centuries, shipwrights augmented their wages by being allowed to carry off these leftovers, known as “chips” for heat or for minor building purposes. Such a process often led to misuse, and some yards prevented their workmen from enjoying the privilege.

In last week’s session the young high school student, George Delano told of the Washingtonian Society’s taking advantage of the privilege and acquiring wheelbarrow loads of chips made available at Rideout’s yard. Bath’s “Deacon” Levi Houghton at another yard was well known for allowing anyone, especially the poor, to glean firewood from scraps of lumber created at his shipyard.

Arthur Sewall had a different approach. He allowed men to take chips but charged them for it. Eventually, he auctioned out the privilege, usually acquired by Levi Totman, who with his team and wagon had access to the yard and the bounty of wood (most of it scrap, but some still usable) which he would peddle.

This photograph of a shipyard sign is a clear statement of its policy towards “chipping.”

(Maine Maritime Museum photo)

An unidentified shipyard worker, responsible for running the “steam box” which prepared planks for bending, told about the policy of General Berry’s Georgetown yard regarding chips: “I was s’posed to have all the ends o’plank that was sawed off, for to burn in my boiler, the workmen was allowed to carry one armful o’big chips – no more – home with ‘em every night.”

(The Georgetown Tide, v. 10 No 4, Nov-Dec 1984.)

(Venetian shipwrights had the same privilege in the Arsenale, Venice’s huge shipbuilding complex and took full advantage of the privilege, even using that yard’s good rope to tie together bundles of large chips so the bundle they carried would be larger and more easily carried.)
GOING TO SEA - LOG OF THE W. F. BABCOCK

[To give you a flavor of family life at sea, here are a few selections from one voyage of the several recorded in a Journal (now at Maine Maritime Museum) kept by Maria Murphy, wife of Capt. James Murphy]

From Baltimore to SF Sunday Jan 21st Lat: 9.07  Long 22.43.

It is time for my wonderful log to begin, so as the ship is quite steady, I will write a little, while the children are on deck. It is three weeks to day since we lost sight of the City of Baltimore but our passage does not begin until we left the cape……Thus far matters have gone along about as usual. We have a most excellent cook and steward and my appetite holds good, if it will only continue.

The children have readily adjusted themselves to sea life, especially Wilder and he is not half the care that he was on land, Jennie is hard to amuse – she cares nothing for toys. I attend some to her lessons and her copies to write. She is very fond of the latter- But everything is “Miss Ring didn’t do that or this.”

The ship is very comfortable for one so heavily loaded and she is two miles faster than the Yorktown – if we can only have good business and be prospered. Have seen very few vessels and have passed every one. I wish we could speak one bound North, so to be reported.

Feb 23rd. Lat 45.25. Long. 55.40. The night of the 16th we had the most fearful tempest I ever experienced! The storm broke right overhead, and the heavens were one sheet of lightning. The ship seemed to be enveloped in the electric fluid and J. said there were balls
of fire in the Yards. I surely thought it struck the ship once. Today the Carpenter caught a porpoise with the harpoon – the first one we ever caught. Some say the meat is hggood – they will try out the blubber.

March 27th Tuesday evening. Lat 46.37. Long 80 S. Pacific – The weather has been so horrible that it was impossible to write with any comfort. Today is the first comfortable day for a month. … The day after I wrote, it began to breeze up, and the weather looked bad, with falling barometer. That day we spoke a Nova Scotia bark in Ballast… I have often wondered how they are getting along… This terrible sea never went down from that time until today! The decks have been full of water, doing much damage. On the 6th of March it blew a hurricane. Every sail was in, but a part of a small one. The roar of the wind and the frightful sea were horrible – the barometer was 27.96- the lowest we ever had. At 3 P.M. a sea boarded up stoving in the Starboard side of the forward house, cleaning the galley out. The poor cook was nearly swept overboard, beside frightening him nearly to death…. On the 9th we made Diego Rameres, the most Southern island. The gales suddenly died away to a calm, the sea running high all the time. That day 18 vessels passed bound to the Eastward. J said there must have been an Easterly wind blowing on the other side to bring the ships together. One bark passed with his main mast completely gone – but a stump of it. Another soon after passed with jib boom and yards gone – sails hanging in rags. On the 17th had a fair wind for a few hours – then in ahead again. J. has had to fight for every mile around the Capt. Ones troubles are generally over when one gets round to 53 or thereabouts, but ours kept on. The wind would be either W.N.W or W.S.W and we were so near the coast could not take advantage of it…. The ship would roll her rails under – it was dangerous to be on the main deck… Some days we could not go to the table – take a mug of coffee and bread and eat it between the lurches.

May 3rd. Lat 9.24. Long 113. At last we have a breeze and I trust we feel thankful enough for it – for since we crossed the line it has been such a tedious spell of calms and light airs. If we don’t get in soon, J. will wear off all his flesh fretting.

Thursday evening May 24th. For the last few days we have had a regular Cape Horn gale with a fearful sea… We never had such a time getting anywhere…It is blowing hard and I feel timid around the land. We do hope to be in tomorrow…Just after writing, our fore upper topsail yard broke in the middle. What will come next. J. is disgusted and discouraged.

Saturday, May 27th – Arrived at last and are anchored off the City. Thank God the voyage is at last ended. How I dread to hear from home!